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दुर्लभबौद्ध ग्रन्थशोधपत्रिका

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43

दुर्लभ बौद्ध ग्रन्थ शोध अनुभाग
केन्द्रीय उच्च तिब्बती शिक्षा संस्थान
सारनाथ, वाराणसी
2007

सहायक-मण्डल

ठाकुरसेन नैगी
ठिनलेराम शाशनी
छेरिंग डोलकर
विजयराम वज्राचार्य

बनारसी लाल
छोग दोर्जे
रंजन कुमार शर्मा

४३वाँ अंक, ५५० प्रतियाँ, २००७

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Dhīh

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Philosophy of *Vipassanā* Meditation : Appreciating the Rationale Basis of the Insightful Meditation

—Sonam Thakchoe—

[Sceptical modern scholarship has so far ignored the philosophical significance of *Vipassanā*. Suspecting it as just another form of mystical religious practice, and therefore lacking any academic value, the academic world often consciously steers clear of *vipassanā*. In this paper however, I intend to make a bold claim that *vipassanā* has a solid philosophical and phenomenological foundation. So the aim of this paper is to demystifying the *vipassanā* by showing the ways in which the principles of *vipassanā* support my claim that it has a profound philosophical foundation. The paper is simply an invitation to anyone, the sceptics and the faithful alike, to consider the strengths and the weaknesses of the arguments presented here. The arguments in the paper unfold progressively, as they are drawn upon the delineation and the discussion of some of the key concepts of the *vipassanā*. Beginning with the epistemological argument of *pañña* (insightful awareness), the paper defends its claim, by way of exploring the phenomenological argument of *vedanā* (experience), the psychological argument of *tanhā* (craving), the soteriological argument of shaking off the *taṇhā* (craving), the epistemological argument of *sampajañña* (correctly and wholly understanding the reality), the methodological argument of *satipaṭṭhāna* (foundations of mindfulness); and the paper concludes with some practical remarks on the significance of catching the moment as a way of applying *vipassanā* in daily life.]

Introduction

Broadly speaking, there are two ways of cultivating mindfulness (*bhāvanā*). The first, called *samatha-bhāvanā* (often translated as 'calm abiding'), is oriented towards the cultivation of mental serenity, single-pointed attention, and mindfulness. This form of meditation is said to sustain mental vigilance; anchoring its awareness on the reality of phenomenon as it is presented to it moment by moment. Overcoming mental agitation, distraction, drowsiness, stress, anxiety and so on, *samatha-bhāvanā* enhances a sustained clarity and concentration of the mind. *Vipassanā*, often translated as 'special insight', 'penetrating insight', 'insightful awareness', on the other hand, is an awareness of truths as they present themselves by way of penetrating into them, dissecting them and disintegrating them. Mutually complementing

each other, mental serenity provides a sustained mental stability while insightful meditation sustains mental awareness. Even as a preliminary requirement for the practice of *vipassanā*, *ānāpānasati* - mindfulness of the breath is introduced (*Ānāpānasati Sutta* MN 118). Observing one's respiration (naturally as it comes in and as it goes out) quietens the mind, stills the discursive thoughts, strips away all accretions of memory (mental verbalisations and conceptualisations related to past experience and the future expectations) and allows the mind to stand back as an objective observer. Witnessing the arising and the passing away of all kinds of thoughts, memories and emotions, mind is able to stand solid like a rock undeterred, serene and composed. Coupled with mental serenity, insightful awareness of *vipassanā* is able to objectively engage with reality, letting reality present itself as it is, in any shape or form, without identifying with it or appropriating it.

Vipassanā practice began some twenty five centuries ago, and is very much alive today. Buddhists have been practising it since its early days, and it is now appropriated in modern psychotherapy to treat various forms of mental disorders. Sceptical modern scholarship has so far ignored its philosophical significance. Suspecting it as just another form of mystical and religious dogma, and therefore lacking any academic value, the academic world often consciously steers clear of *vipassanā*. The paper is simply an invitation to anyone, the sceptics and the faithful alike, to consider the strengths and weaknesses of the arguments presented here. The arguments in the paper unfold progressively, as they are drawn upon the delineation and the discussion of the philosophical and the phenomenological bases of seven key claims made in *vipassanā*. Beginning with the empirical and epistemological argument of *pañña* (insightful awareness); the paper, supports its claim, by way of exploring the phenomenological argument of *vedanā* (experience); the psychological argument of *taṇhā* (craving); the soteriological argument of shaking off the *taṇhā* (craving); the epistemological argument of *sampajañña* (correctly and wholly understanding the reality); the methodological argument of *satipaṭṭhāna* (foundations of mindfulness); and the paper concludes with

awareness of what things really are through *vipassanā*; that it means a total freedom from any conceptual and linguistic barrier.

This second argument becomes clearer as the discussion focuses on the *bhāvanā-mayā paññā*. In the *Saṅgārava Sutta* of the *Majjhima Nikāya* II: 211 of the Pāli canon, there is a reference made to three camps of thinkers: (i) the traditionalists (*anussavikā*), (ii) the rationalists and metaphysicians (*takkī vīmaṃsī*) and (iii) the experientialists. The Buddha says that he belongs to the third group. The rationale behind the Buddha's statement is made clearer in the *Digha Nikāya* III where out of three forms of *paññā* 'knowledge'—*suta-mayā paññā* (P; Skt. *śruta-mayī prajñā*) 'heard-knowledge', *cintā-mayā paññā* (P; Skt. *cintā-mayī prajñā*) 'philosophic-knowledge' and *bhāvanā-mayā paññā* (P; Skt. *bhāvanā-mayī prajñā*) often translated as 'meditative awareness' or 'experiential awareness' or 'lived awareness' - the Buddha inculcates the third. Identifying himself amongst the experientialists, the Buddha recognises the third form of knowledge, the one that springs from the immediate personal experience of the truths as they really are, is more edifying, reliable, and effective, in contrast with the other two forms of knowledge which are theoretical, conceptual, and mediated.

The Buddha's identification with experientialists, on the one hand, and his stress on the cultivation of *vipassanā*, on the other, are therefore closely linked. This is also an indication that the empirical sense of *vipassanā* and that of *bhāvanā-mayā-paññā* corresponds with each other. Both are *bhāvanās*, because both cultivate the awareness of things as they really are, through which the *paññā*, 'insightful awareness', is cultivated.

2. The Epistemological Argument of Insightful Awareness (*paññā*)

The second argument is premised upon a thesis that *vipassanā* is, on the epistemological front, an insightful awareness (*paññā*) of how things really are (*yathābhūtuṃ ñāṇadassanaṃ*). In other words *vipassanā* is seeing and penetrating through things' ultimate truth (*paramattha sacca*) in contrast with the naïve assumption based on reified reality of the conventional/empirical

some practical remarks on the significance of catching the moment as way of applying the *vipassanā* in daily life.

1. The Empirical Argument of *Vipassanā* & Experiential Awareness (*bhāvanā-mayā paññā*)

So let us begin with the first argument which goes as follows: that *vipassanā* (P; Skt. *vipaśyanā*) which means 'to see things in special ways' or 'in the correct way' (*visesa*), 'in different ways' (*vividham*) - comprehends the nature of things personally, directly and immediately. This is because the experiential awareness of how things really are (*bhāvanā-mayā paññā*) arises and unfolds entirely within the framework of one's own psychophysical aggregates. To understand this argument, we need to discuss etymology and the definition of the term '*vipassanā*,' and also the way in which *vipassanā* corresponds to lived awareness (*bhāvanā-mayā paññā*). Etymologically, the root *pas* in the Pali term *vipassana* (P; Skt. *vipaśyanā*) means 'to see', and the particle *vi* means *visesa* 'in a special way'. Less literally it means, *visesa* 'in correct way', *vividham*, 'in different ways' - comprehending the nature of things multi-dimensionally. The word *vipassanā* comes to communicate the sense of seeing things 'as they really are', 'in a special way', more appropriately, 'in the correct way', 'from different angles'. Defining the term *vipassanā* the *Aṭṭhasālinī* stresses the latter sense, hence, it reads: '*vipassanā* is seeing things from the different angles as impermanent.' (124-134)¹ The *Visuddhimagga-mahāṭīkā*, on the other hand, defines '*vipassanā* as seeing [things] in special ways' (2.427).² 'Special way' in the sense that the way in which *vipassanā* sees things is radically different from the commonsense perspective of reality. (We will develop this argument more fully later.) What is crucial to notice in terms of the orientation of *vipassanā* is a twofold arguments: first, that it is always unmediated, because *vipassanā* sees things immediately, directly; second, that it is always non-conceptual, therefore non-linguistic, given the naked

1. *aniccādivasena vividhena ākāreṇa passatī ti vipassanā /*

2. *visesato passatī ti vipassanā /*

truth (*sammuti* or *vohāra-sacca*). This must follow because from the standpoint of *vipassanā*, things are seen as dependently co-arisen (*paṭicca-samuppañña*), impermanent (*anicca*), selfless (*anattā*) and empty (*suñña*).

Etymologically *paññā* is derived from the root *ñā* which means 'to know', 'to be aware', prefixed by *pa* meaning 'correctly'. The literal English equivalence of the word *paññā* is therefore 'to know correctly', 'awareness of thing's true nature'. Commonly used English terms such as 'insight', 'knowledge', 'wisdom', and 'awareness', as we can see, convey the aspects of *paññā*, while none of these terms adequately corresponds to the original Pāli term. Recognising this limitation, I have consistently used 'insightful awareness' to translate *paññā*. Even then, 'insightful awareness' should not be taken as its equivalent. Taking any English word as equivalent to the original term *paññā* clearly does injustice, in particular, to expressing the subtle nuances, and the multi-dimensional character associated with the word *paññā*.

The traditional Pāli texts offer a couple of insightful definitions of the term *paññā*. First, it is defined as *yathābhūtaṃ ñāṇadassanaṃ*, which means 'to see things as they really are'. This definition contradistinguishes *paññā* from the ordinary knowledge of things. While the latter is based on the impression or the perception of the apparent mode of things, *paññā* instead is a direct vision of the true nature of the things—or the ultimate mode of being of things. While *paññā* critically penetrates into the *paramattha sacca* (P; Skt. *paramārtha satya*), 'ultimate truth' for it is the insightful awareness of the penetrating and interlocking nature of all the things. Ordinary knowledge, on the other hand, is premised upon the assumption of reality of the *sammuti* or *vohāra sacca* (P; Skt. *saṃvṛti* or *vyvahāra satya*) 'conventional', or 'empirical truth' since it is firmly fixed upon the knowing of the conventional aspects or the apparent modes of things.

The second definition of *paññā* says, *pakareṇa jānāti' ti paññā*, 'because it sees [things] from different dimensions, it is *paññā*'. Unlike ordinary knowledge which is often only one dimensional, *paññā* is multi-

dimensional in its perspective, in that it sees things from various angles, on various levels of subtleties. This definition is qualified by two arguments, both based on the two perspectives of the same *paññā*. First, when *paññā* sees the things synthetically, i.e., non-analytically, it knows things from the macro perspective, holistically and constructively, because from this dimension of *paññā*, things are seen as the *paṭicca-samuppanna* (P; Skt. *pratītya-samutpanna*) 'dependently co-arisen' - in that they are loci of inter-relational processes, a matrix of inter-related phenomena, subjected to the constant becoming. Second, when *paññā* engages with the world analytically, it sees things from the micro level, minutely and deconstructively, because from this micro-dimension *paññā* is directly aware of thing's subtle realities of being *anicca* (P; Skt. *anitya*), in 'constant flux', 'ever-changing' and 'ever-becoming'; *anattā* (P; Skt. *an-ātman*), 'not-self'-coreless personality or the lacking of an abiding spirit; and *sūnya* (P; Skt. *śūnya*) 'empty' - devoid of any determinate underlying substance or essence. Both the perspectives of *paññā*, and therefore both the arguments demonstrate a radical departure of *paññā* from the commonsense view of the world wherein, phenomenologically speaking, things are viewed as having inherently enduring substances, an essential core, and the people possessing the abiding spirits, identities, or selves enduring through the time and the space.

The two arguments premised upon the two perspectives of *paññā* are however not contradictory with one another. Rather they are complementary dimensions of *paññā*, as both are coextensive and mutually entail each other, as both function in mutually supportive ways in establishing the lack of essence or any determinate core in everything there is. The contrasting factor between the two arguments is this. To argue that *paññā* sees things macroscopically, is to argue it sees them constructively, interconnectedly and dependently co-arisenly, whereas to argue that *paññā* sees things microscopically, is to argue that it visions them deconstructively, minutely, piercingly, penetratingly. This must follow because while explicitly stressing the constructive approach or its positive mode of seeing things, the

argument implicitly establishes the deconstructive mode of engagement of *paññā*. Explicitly stressing *paññā*'s deconstructive mode of engagement, the argument implicitly establishes its constructive mode of engagement. A crucial textual support to this argument comes from the *Samyutta Nikāya*, where the Buddha offers the explanation of the way in which *paññā* operates in the four noble truths: 'Bhikkhu, he who sees suffering sees also the origin of suffering, sees also the cessation of suffering, sees also the way leading to the cessation of suffering' (5.437)¹. The significance of the Buddha's statements is illustrated in the *Visuddhimagga* of Buddhagosa with the help of a simile: as the lamp burns the wick, so *paññā* fully understands suffering, as the lamp dispels the darkness, so *paññā* abandons the origin of suffering, as the lamp makes the light appear, so *paññā* develops the path, as the lamp uses up the oil, so *paññā* realises cessation which brings end to the defilements (Ñānamoli, 2001: 809).

So the conclusion from the epistemological arguments is this: whether *paññā* sees things as dependently arisen or it sees them as empty, it essentially does not deviate from seeing how things really are, the central preoccupation of *vipassanā*.

3. The Phenomenological Argument of *Vedanā* 'Experience'

So the question at issue here is how does the *vipassanā* give rise to the *bhāvanā-mayā paññā*? The answer to this question comes from the phenomenological argument of *vedanā* which states: that the *vedanā* (experience constituting the entire physical sensation and psychological/emotional feelings) is the phenomenological foundation for the cultivation of *vipassanā*, for it is fundamentally centred in awakening the phenomenological structure of experience although this is achieved by way of appropriating the *vedanā* itself. This must follow because of an intimate connection between the mind and *vedanā* such that every mental thought results in physical/emotional *vedanā*.

Let us take some time to understand this argument. At the heart of the argument is the role of *vedanā* and the way in which *vipassanā*

1. Yo bhikkhave.....dukkhanirodam pi passatī ti.

appropriates *vedanā*. The term *vedanā*, loosely translated as 'sensations' or 'feeling' covers the entire range of physical and mental experiences, therefore I prefer to use the term 'experience' in order to encompass its scope of *vedanā*. *Vedanā* is defined in terms of fulfilling three criteria: first *yā vedayati ti vedanā*, 'that which feels the object is *vedanā*', second, *sā vedayitalakkhaṇā*, 'its characteristic is to experience', and third, *anubhavanarasā*, 'its function is to realise the object' (Buddhagosa, *Visuddhimagga*:101). Drawing upon this definition, *vedanā* is the medium through which the truths about sensory objects are experienced, physically, emotionally or psychologically.

Concerning the relationship between the mind and the *vedanā*, in the *Aṅguttara Nikāya*, the Buddha issues one of his famous injunctions: *vedanāsamosaṇā sabbe dhammā* 'everything that arises in the mind (*dhamma*) flows through the bodily sensations' (3.10.58). This passage is profoundly significant in understanding the argument at stake here, for it cuts through the practical and the philosophical underpinnings of *vipassanā* as it dissolves the problematic subject-object, (*nāma* 'mind'/*rūpa* 'matter') dichotomy, and establishes the ground for understanding them as closely inter-related phenomena. The *nāma* consists of *citta*, 'consciousnesses' and *dhammas*, 'mental concomitants' arising in the *citta*, whereas *rūpa* consists of *kāya*, 'physical body' and *vedanā* 'sensation' arising on the *kāya*.

Two premises underlie the principle in the Buddha's injunction. Both the premises defend the thesis of an undivided unity that exists between mind and matter and *vedanā* is that which brings the two together. First, and indeed the more explicit one is this: that all *dhammas* - namely, thoughts and emotions - that arise in the mind quickly change into matter as bodily *vedanā*, 'bodily sensation' because whatever arises in the mind, say anger, ill-will, hatred, instantly culminates in unpleasant bodily sensations. Whereas the consciousness saturated by love, benevolence, and goodwill instantly culminates in pleasant bodily sensations. Also crucial to understand what is at stake in the first premise is the second premise implicit in the Buddha's injunction, which states as follows: Just as the mind

transforms into matter (although predominantly into mental states), so the matter transforms into the mind (although predominantly into material phenomenon), because the *vedanā* flowing on the body triggers the mental *dhammas* of thoughts and emotional responses. This must follow because as a response to the pleasant bodily sensation, craving and clinging arise, as a reaction against the unpleasant bodily sensation, aversion, anger, hatred and ill-will arise, and as a response to the neutral bodily sensation, ignorance and indifference arise.

Underpinning both the premises is the idea the Buddha expresses in the *Anguttara Nikāya*, which states: 'within every *dhamma vedanā* is present' (AN III 10.58). What this means is that *dhammas* of thoughts and emotions arise in the mind as result of the reactions against the *vedanā* flowing on the body. *Vedanā* on the body, on the other hand, arises due to the response to the *dhammas*, psychological/emotional *vedanās* in the mind. Whether it is the bodily *vedanā* giving rise to the mental *vedanā* or the mental *vedanā* giving rise to the bodily *vedanā*, in either case the presence of *vedanā* is the key. Based on this principle *vipassanā* employs the bodily *vedanā* as an instrument in its pathway to transform the *dhammas* of anger, of attachment and of ignorance in the mind. The application of *vedanā* to this end also follows from the arguments discussed earlier: that it is through the *vedanā* as a medium the sensory objects are experienced and that it is through the medium of *vedanā* alone that the *paññā*, 'insightful awareness' of *anicca* 'impermanence', *dukkha* 'suffering', and *anattā* 'not-self' and *sūnyatā* 'emptiness' is developed.

Seeing the centrality of *vedanā*, in the *Anguttara Nikāya*, the Buddha goes even further: 'To one who experiences *vedanā*, monks, I teach the truth of suffering, I teach the truth of the arising of suffering, I teach the truth of the cessation of suffering and I teach the truth of the path leading to the cessation of suffering' (AN 1.3.62).¹ There are four premises supporting

1. *vediyamānassa kho pañāhaṃ bhikkhave, idaṃ dukkhaṃ ti paññāpemi, ayaṃ dukkha-samudayo ti paññāpemi ayaṃ dukkha-nirodho ti paññāpemi, ayaṃ dukkha-nirodha-gāminī-paṭipadā ti paññāpemi /*

the Buddha's claim: first, that the *vedanā* is the basis through which one develops a correct realisation of the truth of suffering - suffering of suffering, suffering of change and pervasive and conditioned suffering - because such realisation requires directly experiencing the unpleasant *vedanās* of suffering, physically, emotionally and psychologically. Second, that *vedanā* is the phenomenological basis through which one abandons the truth of arising of suffering - karma, afflicted thoughts and emotions - because such abandonment requires experiencing, through the medium of *vedanā*, the way in which the afflictive emotions, thoughts and karma result in suffering. Third, that *vedanā* is the phenomenological basis through which one attains freedom from or cessation of the suffering - *nirvāṇa* and buddhahood - because the freedom from suffering is the freedom from the truth of arising of suffering at the level of physical/emotional/psychological *vedanā*. Finally, that *vedanā* is the phenomenological basis through which one develops the truth of path leading to the cessation of suffering - the eightfold noble path - because these paths are progressively internally experienced through the *vedanā* within oneself guided by right understanding.

All the premises presented above definitively demonstrate that *vedanā* is the phenomenological instrument through which one develops *paññā*, insightful awareness of the four noble truths and the other relevant insights that emerge from it. This conclusion must follow from the fact that *vedanā* constitutes the entirety of our experience, and that *vedanā* is instrumental in order to develop a direct awareness of truths (suffering, origin, cessation and path). It therefore makes perfect sense that the Buddha teaches *vipassanā* only to those who can experience the *vedanā*, after all *paññā*, an insightful awareness, can only emerge with the experience of *vedanā* as its phenomenological basis.

4. The Psychological Argument of *Vedanā* (Experience) & *Taṇhā* (Craving)

Vedanā is, as argued above, the locus of developing *vipassanā*, because the latter is founded upon the *paññā*, insightful awareness of *vedanā*. It is

important to bear in the mind that *vedanā* - experience of physical sensations, emotional/psychological feelings - however is not in itself constitutive of the *paññā* despite it providing the basis for the arising of *paññā*, for the latter depends on the direct awareness of the former. This follows because the same *vedanā* can also be the basis from which the arising of *avijjā* 'ignorance', 'confusion' - the antithesis of *paññā* - occurs. To clarify: a correct understanding of the nature of *vedanā* constitutes *paññā*, hence, *vipassanā* employs *vedanā* as a means to realise *nibbāna* (P; Skt. *nirvāṇa*) 'ultimate freedom', the failure to realise the true characteristics of *vedanā* however, constitutes a bondage in the *saṃsāric* suffering as it leads to the arising of *taṇhā* 'craving', to *upādāna* 'clinging' and to *bhava* 'becoming'. To be sure, depending on the response to *vedanā*, the latter either becomes a vehicle to *saṃsāric* bondage or to *nibbānic* freedom. This distinction in the uses of *vedanā*, so vital in the philosophy and the practice of *vipassanā*, takes us into the next major argument.

Vedanā is the phenomenological basis for the arising of the psychological/emotional conditioning of *taṇhā* on three grounds: that *taṇhā* of craving arises in response to the pleasant experience; that *taṇhā* of aversion arises in response to the unpleasant experience; and that *taṇhā* of ignorance arises in response to the neutral experience. These must follow because *taṇhā* arises in response to *vedanā* - physical/emotional/psychological experiences - as the result of the contact between the senses and the sensory objects, and that *vedanā* is the crucial link between desire and the object of desire upon which it is fixated.

What this argument points to is the existence of an invariable link between *vedanā* and *taṇhā* (P; Skt. *trṣṇā*) 'craving' - conditioned by the defilements of craving, aversion, ignorance, inner drives, thirsts - to reach out for the pleasant experience, or the urge to repel the unpleasant experience, or simply to ignore the indifferent experience, because *taṇhā* arises in response to the type of *vedanā*. *Taṇhā* consists of the psychological and emotional fixation through craving, aversion and ignorance, where as *vedanā* is the crucial link between craving and the objects of craving,

aversion and the objects of aversion, indifference and the objects of indifference. This argument also explains the reason behind the central preoccupation of *vipassanā*, namely, to develop a heightened awareness of *vedanā* (especially bodily sensations) free from any reaction to it whatsoever, for only such awareness of *vedanā* has the capacity to eradicate the fixation of *taṇhā*.

While the commonsense assumption is that craving arises exclusively from sensory objects, which is to say that sense objects themselves lead to the arising of craving (*saḷāyatanapaccayā taṇhā*), the philosophy of *vipassanā* however argues differently. It maintains that *vedanā* is the vital link between the senses and the sensory objects, and therefore, argues that sense objects lead to the arising of *vedanā* (*saḷāyatanapaccayā vedanā*), and *vedanā* in turn leads to the arising of craving (*vedanā paccayā taṇhā*). Three premises support the thesis that *vedanā* is the missing link between the sense objects and the *taṇhā*. *Taṇhā* arises at the level of *vedanā* because it is either conditioned by craving that arises in response to the pleasant *vedanā* (pleasant sensations/feelings immediately flowing on one's body and in the mind but not from the pleasant objects themselves); or it is conditioned by aversion that arises in response to the unpleasant *vedanā* (unpleasant sensations/feelings immediately flowing on one's body and in the mind but not from the unpleasant objects); or conditioned by ignorance that arises in response to the neutral *vedanā* (neutral sensations/feelings flowing immediately on one's body and in the mind, not from the neutral objects themselves).

All three premises point to the effect that the root of the human problems is the mental conditioning or the fixation of *taṇhā* (intuitive and instinctive drives), and that it is deeply seeded in *vedanā*. Therefore *taṇhā* must be addressed or eradicated at the level of *vedanā*. Consider an alcoholic and a drug addict. An alcoholic knows, at least on the intellectual front, perhaps even on the physical level, that too much consumption of alcohol is ruining his life - the loss of wealth and health. A drug addict also knows very well that his habit of abusing drugs is gradually abusing himself. In

spite of having the intellectual knowledge of the harmful nature of their habits, both the alcoholic and the drug addict continue the abusive life-styles nevertheless. The question is “why?” For the Buddha, the answer is simple. While the addiction occurs at the level of bodily *vedanā* as a reaction to the apparent bodily pleasantness, the knowledge about the harmful affects of the addiction is only an intellectual one, and does not arise from the level of experience. Freedom from the deep seated addiction however must arise, according to the *vipassanā* tradition, from the actual experiential insight, therefore from the realisation of truth at the level of *vedanā*, experience, rather than mere intellectual understanding.

The realisation of truth at the level of *vedanā* is precisely the entire focus of the function of *vipassanā*. The reason is as follows: The addictive nature of *taṇhā* ceases to arise with the cessation of the reaction against *vedanā*, as it is the latter that fuels the former. The reaction against the *vedanā* ceases with the arising of equanimity, an objective awareness of characteristics of *vedanā*, realising it in constant flux - vision of it as arising (*samudaya-dhamma-anupassī*) and vision of it as ceasing (*vaya-dhamma-anupassī*). Observing all forms of *vedanā* with the vision of equanimity, *vipassanā* stops the arising of *taṇhā* at the level of bodily and emotional experience since *vipassanā* stops feeding *taṇhā* by reacting against *vedanā* bodily and mentally. This must follow because *vipassanā* is the cultivation of awareness of equanimity with respect to all forms of *vedanā*, both physical and mental.

It is clear then that the way in which *vipassanā* responds to *vedanā* is in having neither one with *taṇhā* of craving for pleasant experience nor one with *taṇhā* of aversion for unpleasant experience nor with *taṇhā* of indifference to neutral experience. Rather the response of *vipassanā* entails an attentive awareness with equanimity, knowing objectively, *vedanā* as the process of arising and passing away (*uppādavaya dhammino*), of the transient (*anicca*), of the stressful (*dukkha*), of the selfless (*anattā*). When the arising of *taṇhā* stops through the practice of *vipassanā*, only then dawns the freedom from the addictive nature of *taṇhā* with respect to all forms of

experiences of *vedanā*. The Buddha, in the *Brahmajāla Sutta*, supports this argument when he proclaims: 'Having experienced as they really are, the arising of sensations, their passing away, the relishing in them, the danger in them, the release from them, the enlightened one, O monks, has become free without grasping' (DN 1.36).¹

The conclusion of the psychological argument is that the problem of the addictive fixation of *taṇhā* for anything - including obsession to drugs, alcohol, junk food, or any other sense object - must be addressed at the level of sensation. Given the *vipassanā* claims to attend to the problem of the addictive fixation of *taṇhā* at the level of *vedanā*, experience, we will find out: How does it do it? The answer to this question comes from the argument related to the inner workings of *vipassanā*, to be more precise, the soteriological argument pertaining to the way in which *vipassanā* shakes off the fixation of *taṇhā* for the pleasant, the unpleasant, and the neutral *vedanās*.

5. The Soteriological Argument of *Vedanā* (Experience) & *Taṇhā* (Craving)

As argued earlier, the problem of suffering is deeply rooted in *taṇhā*, and *taṇhā* in turn is seeded in *vedanā*. *Taṇhā* of craving arises due to the thirst for the pleasant experience, *taṇhā* of aversion arises in reaction against the unpleasant experience, and *taṇhā* of ignorance arises due to the indifferent attitude towards the neutral experience. Strictly speaking, suffering arises with the arising of *taṇhā*, and there is no temporal sequence between the two. Suffering is inevitable so long as *taṇhā* persists, since the latter is the former. From this it follows that the freedom from suffering means the eradication of *taṇhā* - releasing oneself from the fixated addiction of cravings at the level of *vedanā*. The process of release, according to the *vipassanā* tradition, occurs at the level of *vedanā*, direct experience. What this means is that no amount of intellectual exercises, devotional practices, or emotional reactions against the deeply seeded conditioning of *taṇhā*, it is

1. *Vedanānaṃ samudayañca atthaṅgamañca assādañca ādīnavañca nissaraṇaṃ yathābhūtaṃ viditvā anupāda-vimutto, bhikkhave tathāgato.*

argued, could release oneself from the suffering because none of these attends to the root of *taṇhā* - that is, none of these superficial responses sever *taṇhā* at the level of *vedanā*.

So we turn to the next argument. The thesis is that *vedanā* is the pathway through which *vipassanā* achieves the psychological/emotional freedom from the conditioning of *taṇhā* and it is corroborated by threefold premises:

- * first, addiction to *taṇhā* of craving to pleasant experience (*vedanā*) is eradicated by means of employing the pleasant experience because the addiction of craving (*taṇhā*) arises in response to the pleasant *vedanā*;
- * second, addiction to *taṇhā* of aversion to unpleasant experience (*vedanā*) is eliminated by the means of the unpleasant experience because it arises in response to the unpleasant experience; and
- * third, addiction to *taṇhā* of ignorance to neutral experience is eradicated by the means of the neutral experience because it arises in response to the neutral experience.

The argument takes into account the way in which *taṇhā* arises in response to *vedanā* - physical/emotional/psychological experiences - as a result of the contact between the senses and the sensory objects, and therefore *vedanā* is the crucial link between the sensory objects and the senses. The three premises are drawn from three different expressions of *taṇhā* (of craving, of aversion and of ignorance), and three approaches to eradicating *taṇhā* (three modes of employing the *vedanā* in the *vipassanā*). Let us turn to the trio one at a time:

5.1. Appropriating the Unpleasant Experience

The first of the trio is the premise concerned with the means to be appropriated in eradicating *taṇhā* of aversion towards the unpleasant *vedanā*. The argument comes from the *Samyutta Nikāya*, which reads: 'Eradicate the latent tendency of aversion using unpleasant sensation', it says (SN 2.4.251).¹ Putting the point differently, an unpleasant *vedanā* itself is

1. *dukkhāya, vedanāya paṭighānusayo pahātabbo /*

employed as the means to eradicate *taṇhā* of aversion towards the unpleasant *vedanā* because aversion to an unpleasant experience arises in response to the unpleasant *vedanā* flowing either on one's body or in one's mind. In the *Nakulapitūssa* of the *Saṃyutta Nikāya*, we read an incident occurred in the Buddha's lifetime. That incident clarifies the idea of appropriating the painful bodily sensation as a tool for eradicating the mental aversion. It is said that Nakulapitā and his wife loved the Buddha dearly like their own son, and they regularly went to see him. As Nakula grew old, his health did not permit him to see the Buddha as he would have liked. When the Buddha saw him sad and depressed as the consequence, the Buddha offered this advice: 'Dāyaka! This body is always overwhelmed by diseases; it is just like an easily breakable egg. As it is covered with a thin layer of skin, it is always subject to outward dangers. Dāyaka! It is nothing but foolish when a person says about this—"I am really healthy". Dāyaka, you have to train yourself like this—"Though my body has pain, I will leave my mind unhurt' (SN 2.2 [VRI 2.3.1])

Here are the reasons behind the Buddha's advice: While facing some form of physical pain is an inevitable fact of life, mental suffering is not. Physical suffering associated with illness, aging and death, it is argued, does not necessarily lead to mental strife, depending on the response to physical pain, it can become a vehicle to attaining nirvāṇa. If the response to physical pain is one of a conditioned reaction with *taṇhā* of aversion, the consequence is naturally emotional and psychological strife, because of the causal connection between the two. Whereas if the response to physical pain is one of understanding with an insightful awareness, free from the habit of conditioned reaction of *taṇhā*, naturally the consequence is emotional and psychological joy and freedom, because of the causal connection between the two. In contrast to mental *dhammas* which necessarily transform themselves into the bodily *vedanās*, as argued earlier, bodily *vedanā* does not mechanically transform itself into the mental *dhamma*. An unpleasant bodily *vedanā* only leads to the arising of mental agony in the presence of the reactions against *vedanā*. The implication behind the Buddha's advice to Nakula is, in spite of the fact that one is afflicted by physical pain, one does

not necessarily undergo mental agony as a result. Should physical pain itself be appropriated as a means of stopping the conditioned reaction of *taṇhā* to the painful physical experience, the arising of mental agony ceases. Therefore one is released from the psychological aversion and mental strife associated with it. In this way the practice of *vipassanā* protects the mind from being hurt by one's physical illness, and this is the essence of the Buddha's message to Nakula.

To understand the premise at issue, the distinction drawn between physical pain and mental agony needs to become clearer. And to understand fully the implication of physical pain being appropriated as a means to eradicate the mental agony, we turn to the Buddha's definitions of *dukkha* ('bodily pain') and *domanassa* ('mental agony'). In the *Dīgha Nikāya*, the Buddha describes *dukkha*, 'bodily pain' in the following terms: 'What now, O monks, is pain? If there is, O monks, any kind of bodily pain, any kind of bodily unpleasantness or any kind of painful or unpleasant sensation as a result of bodily contact—this, O monks, is called pain' (DN 2.393).¹ Characteristically, *dukkha* is any bodily unpleasant sensation. Causally, *dukkha* arises due to the bodily contact with its corresponding objects. A contact between the body and the external objects results in the physical pain, that is, whether or not there is no mental reaction involved. In contrast, a contact between the bodily pain and the mind (that is, mental reaction to the physical pain) results in both the bodily and the mental pain because of the presence of the mental response to the painful bodily sensation. In this respect, bodily pain should not be taken as purely physical. In the presence of the mental consciousness, any type of *vedanā* must be felt or experienced, either bodily, or mentally, or both bodily and mentally. The body alone cannot make any sense of *vedanā*, so if there is no concept of pain, there is neither the pleasure nor the neutral in isolation of the mental function.

1. *Katamañca, bhikkhave, dukkhaṃ? Yaṃ kho, bhikkhave, kāyikaṃ dukkhaṃ kāyikaṃ asātaṃ kāyasamphassaṃ dukkhaṃ asātaṃ vedayitaṃ, idaṃ vuccati, bhikkhave, dukkhaṃ /*

How is physical pain, *dukkha* different from *domanassa*, mental agony? On the latter, the Buddha has this to say: 'What now, O monks, is agony? If there is, O monks, any kind of mental pain, any kind of mental unpleasantness or any kind of painful or unpleasant feeling as a result of mental contact—this, O monks, is called agony' (DN 2.394).¹ *Domanassa* is literally translated as 'mental agony'. In a stricter sense, it is characterised as emotional/psychological grief', emotional/psychological unpleasant experience, or what is termed simply as 'unpleasant inner feelings'. Causally, *domanassa* is produced from the mental contact with the mental objects such as ideas, beliefs, desires, fears, anger or reaction against the external objects.

Of *domanassa*, 'mental agony' and of *dukkha* 'bodily pain', the latter is appropriated as a pathway to eradicate the former. There are couple of reasons for this. First, from a practical point of view, the physical *vedanā* of pain is a more tangible experience and more suited to the development of the insightful awareness and equanimity compared to the mental *vedanā* of agony which is more fluid and abstract. Second, because mental agony is triggered by reacting against the physical pain, a non-reactive awareness of the physical pain gradually weakens the mental agony, and eventually, eliminates it entirely. So *dukkha*, 'physical pain' is employed as an instrument to eradicate *taṇhā* of aversion, to shake off *domanassa*, 'mental agony' that arises from the unpleasant bodily *vedanā*.

Let us have a closer look at how this works in *vipassanā*: Ordinarily the mind is conditioned to react against anything that is physically unpleasant. Therefore typical response to the flow of painful experience on the body is one with the *taṇhā* of aversion. Constituted by four interrelated activities, this response: first exaggerates the physical pain as something unbearable; second robs of mental composure, equanimity and objectivity; third gives rise to mental agitation, agony and stress; and finally, compels

1. *katamañca bhikkhave, domanassam? Yaṃ kho, bhikkhave, cetasikaṃ dukkhaṃ cetasikaṃ asātaṃ manosaṃphassajaṃ dukkhaṃ asātaṃ vedayitaṃ, idaṃ vuccati, bhikkhave, domanassam.*

the mind to identify itself with the mental agony - now it thinks, 'I am in the pain', 'I am sick', 'I am this', and 'I am that'. These are the ways in which *taṇhā* of aversion, reacting against the physical unpleasant experience, conditions the mind into producing more psychological agony. The task of *vipassanā* is to decondition the habitual pattern of *taṇhā* of aversion - to stop *taṇhā* of aversion from habitually feeding itself on the vicious cycles of negative thoughts produced from reacting against the unpleasant physical experience. Instead the response of *vipassanā* is to develop an objective awareness of the physical pain as it is. In so doing, an insightful awareness of the underlying characteristics of the physical pain come to the fore. That is, an awareness of even the most painful sensation as subjected to the law of flux - constantly becoming and constantly passing away - and that physical pain is essentially a locus of empty process, utterly lacking any substance or core. Understanding the pain in this way undermines the conditioned habit of the mind to react with the *taṇhā* of aversion, and thus allows the unfolding of the inner composure, mindfulness and objective observation. Stilled awareness, freed from the habitual conditioning of reaction, released from the ensnares of *taṇhā*, progressively heals the mental stress and agony - the body might be plagued by the physical pain, but the mind is able to retain sustained serenity and insightful awareness.

In this way a proper practice of *vipassanā* prevents *dukkha* 'physical pain' from becoming a *domanass* 'mental' and 'psychological problem' - a painful physical sensation is now left confined to the physical domain, and it no longer feeds into a psychological reaction. A gradual progression on the path of *vipassanā* steadily weakens the conditioned, habitual reactive mind, *taṇhā* of aversion, and consequently attains a gradual release from the *domanassa*, 'mental agony' by means of appropriating the physical *dukkha*.

5.2. Appropriating the Pleasant Experience

The second premise, on the other hand, is concerned with the eradication of *taṇhā* of craving for the pleasant *vedanā*. Again this premise comes from the *Saṃyutta Nikāya*'s passage which reads: 'Eradicate the latent tendency of

craving through the pleasant sensations' (SN 2.3.251).¹ The *Paṭṭhāna* also states: 'Dependent on the pleasant bodily sensations ... *vipassanā* arises ... Path arises ... Knowledge arises ... attainment of [*nibbāna*] arises' (1.1.423).² Both the texts suggest the appropriation of pleasant *vedanā* as means to come out from *taṇhā* of craving for the pleasant *vedanā*. So the argument goes like this: that pleasant *vedanā* itself is employed as the means to eradicate *taṇhā* of craving towards the pleasant *vedanā* because the origin of craving is a pleasant experience, as it arises in response to the pleasant *vedanā* flowing either in ones body or in ones mind.

The issue here is: how is the pleasant bodily experience employed as a vehicle to eradicate *taṇhā* of craving towards the pleasant sensation? To answer this question, and therefore to explain the argument, it is helpful to draw upon the distinction the Buddha makes between *sukkhā* 'pleasant bodily sensations' and *somanassa* 'pleasant mental feelings' in the *Dīgha Nikāya*. The Buddha defines *sukkhā* as any kind of bodily pleasure, any kind of bodily pleasantness or any kind of pleasurable or pleasant feeling as a result of bodily contact. Whereas *somanassa*, according to this definition, is any kind of mental joy, any kind of mental pleasantness or any kind of joyful or pleasant feeling as a result of mental contact. Of the two, *sukkhā* is bodily, whereas *somanassa* is psychological/emotional.

Ordinarily the mind is conditioned to react to anything that is *sukkhā*, physically pleasant. A typical response to the flow of pleasant experience on the body is with *taṇhā* of craving, clinging and grasping. Constituted by four interrelated activities pertaining to *taṇhā* of craving, this response: first, exaggerates the nature of physical pleasantness; second, yields to the attachment or clinging to the pleasure causing mental unbalance and disturbing its inner composure, equanimity and objectivity; third, produces mental stress and frustration as a consequence of reaching out for

1. *sukhāya, bhikkhave, vedanāya rāga anusayo pahātabbo* ..

2. *Pakatūpanissayo—kāyikaṃ sukhaṃ upanissāya. ... vipassanaṃ uppādeti, maggaṃ uppādeti, abhiññāṃ uppādeti, samāpattiṃ uppādeti.*

the illusive pleasure; finally, conditions the mind to naively assume the sense of substance-self identifying oneself with the physical pleasure - 'I am happy', 'I want happiness'. In this manner, the fixation of *taṇhā* transforms the physical pleasantness into a psychological conditioning. So the primary task of *vipassanā* is to mindfully deconstruct this habitual pattern of the mind, and free the mind from this fixated conditioning. Consequently, the mind, instead of reacting against the pleasant bodily sensation with *taṇhā* of craving, clinging and grasping, it develops an insightful awareness of the true characteristics of the pleasant bodily experience as its response. In so doing, even the most blissful bodily sensation is now seen as subjected to the law of flux—constantly becoming and constantly passing away, essentially lacking any substance or core. Realising the pleasant bodily experience in the way it is described, *vipassanā* releases the mind from its conditioned habit of reacting with the *taṇhā* of craving, thus sustaining mental calmness and composure, mindfulness and objective awareness.

A stilled mind unaffected by the habitual conditioning of craving, clinging, grasping, is progressively released from the snares of *taṇhā*, and therefore relieves itself from the mental stress and frustration fuelled by unfulfilled desires. The insightful awareness cultivated through the *vipassanā*, in this way, prevents *sukkhā* 'physical bliss' becoming a *domanassa* 'mental/psychological grief. Blissful physical sensation is left confined to a physical limit without allowing it to fuel the psychological want. Progressively *vipassanā* weakens the fixation of *taṇhā*, so there is a gradual emergence of the freedom from the *domanass*, mental agony, frustration, upsets, yearnings. As *taṇhā* of craving for pleasant experience steadily weakens, simultaneously, there is a steady growth of *somanassa* 'inner joy', 'contentment', 'peace' and 'tranquillity. This implies that the rationale behind the *vipassanā*'s appropriation of *sukkhā* as a pathway to eradicate the *taṇhā* of craving, clinging and grasping for the pleasant *vedanā* must not be construed as a way of getting rid of the pleasant experiences, it simply is not the case. On the contrary the more one eradicates the *taṇhā* of

craving the more profound and blissful one's experience of joy and satisfaction become.

5.3. Appropriating the Neutral Experience

Finally, the third premise is concerned with the eradication of *taṇhā* of ignorance towards neither pleasant nor unpleasant sensation (*adukkham-asukhā vedanā*) which states: that neutral *vedanā* is appropriated as the means to eradicate ignorance or indifferent attitude towards the neutral experience. This is tenable because of the causal relationship between the two - the fact that ignorance arises from the neutral experience is the result of *taṇhā*'s response to the neutral experience. Again the source of this argument is the *Saṃyutta Nikāya*, for it reads: 'Eradicate the latent tendency of ignorance using neither pleasant nor unpleasant sensations' (SN 2.4.24).¹

Unlike the more obvious characteristics of the pleasant and the unpleasant bodily experience, neutral experience is subtler, and therefore indifference is the typical reaction to this experience. Indifference might not stir up destructive emotions to the extent the pleasant and the unpleasant experiences do, but it is nevertheless causally produced by the power of ignorance, deluded mind - the lack of *pañña*, insightful awareness of the true nature of neutral sensation/feeling. Since ignorance is either actively reifying cognitive process or fixated upon the reified objects, it obscures the mind from realising the correct nature pertaining to neutral sensations/feelings and negatively conditions the mind to feed upon the distorted tendency of *taṇhā* of ignorance towards neither pleasant nor unpleasant sensation. Breaking this conditioned habit by way of cultivating the awareness of the true characteristics pertaining to the neutral sensations/feeling, and thus eradicating the ignorance is therefore the primary task of the *vipassanā* in the third approach.

Comparatively stated, neutral experience is subtler than the pleasant and unpleasant bodily sensations. That is, neutral experience is more difficult to be felt or sensed both bodily and mentally. For this same reason

1. "adukkhamasukhāya vedanāya avijjānusayo anuseti" ti (MN 1.465).

ignorance is more difficult to eliminate since its object is less obvious. Employing the neutral sensation as a pathway to eradicate *taṇhā* of ignorance requires the mind to be ever more single-pointed, vigilant and observant. The danger of the mind losing its objective clarity and a balanced gaze is that this could stir up more turbulent emotions and thoughts on the surface of the mind, thereby overshadowing the neutral sensations. An insightful awareness of *vipassanā* realises the true nature of the neutral experience as transient, essentially coreless. As a result deluded, indifferent attitude towards the neutral sensation no long persists. To be sure, neutral experience persists, but once the insightful awareness of *paññā* replaces *taṇhā* of ignorance, the latter ceases to be operative.

Briefly stated: because of the subtler nature of *taṇhā* involved, the operation of the third approach, the approach itself is thus subtler than the two previous techniques - namely, freedom from *taṇhā* of craving for the pleasantness by appropriating the pleasant experience as a vehicle, and freedom from the *taṇhā* of aversion for unpleasantness through the medium of the unpleasant experience. All three premises are complementary since they are drawn upon the three approaches by which the addictive conditioning of *taṇhā* is eradicated. So the implication of each premise needs to be understood in the light of the other two. This follows because the three ways in which *vedanā* is appropriated to eliminate the habitual conditioning of *taṇhā*, with all three functioning in a complementary manner, supporting each other, and operating interdependently of one another. Weakening *taṇhā* of aversion towards the unpleasant experience, *vipassanā* indirectly undermines *taṇhā*'s fixation through craving and clinging towards the pleasant sensation and, so also, the indifference towards the neutral sensations. Also by weakening the *taṇhā*'s addictive nature of craving and clinging, *taṇhā*'s conditioned habit of aversion and ignorance is also undermined. That said, the initial weakening and the eventual elimination of the conditioned habit of *taṇhā* to react to the experience is a very delicate and difficult task. To set the mind totally free from the conditioned habit of *taṇhā*

the *Saṃyutta Nikāya* (SN 2.4.257)¹ proposes a sustained practice of *sampajañña* - mindful and objective response with the eye of *paññā*, insightful awareness which realises the true characteristics constituting the entire field of *vedanā*.

6. The Epistemological Argument of *Sampajañña* ('thorough understanding') and *Vedanā* (Experience)

This takes us to the sixth major argument which states: that the mind experiences the true freedom of release from the conditionings of *taṇhā* only when *sampajañña* fully establishes the entire field of *vedanā*, the domain of experience, as coreless, empty, transient, perishable, conditioned and dependently co-arisen, such that the very fabric of *taṇhā* is destroyed and is made inoperative. This follows because *sampajañña* attacks the very basis upon which *taṇhā* clings, and given *vedanā* is that to which *taṇhā* is fixated upon, *sampajañña* critically and deconstructively engages with *vedanā* penetratingly and piercingly such that *vedanā* no longer appears to be intrinsic. On the critical investigative approach of *sampajañña*, *vedanā* is established as neither inherently pleasant, nor inherently unpleasant nor inherently neither nor inherently both, rather the entire field of experience is established as empty of any intrinsic property of its own, and therefore coreless, transient, perishable, conditioned and dependently arisen. Once the awareness of the reality of *vedanā* is established, *taṇhā*'s conditioned habit of reacting with craving, aversion, and indifference becomes inoperative.

The content of this argument is not entirely new. All the previous arguments and the follow up discussions touch upon the substance of this argument. While this argument specifically attributes a critical investigative awareness as the property of *sampajañña*, the discussion hitherto treats this critical cognitive skill as a generic quality attributed to *paññā*, insightful awareness, and of *vipassanā*. What it means in essence is this: *vipassanā* is

1. *Tissa imā, bhikkhave, vedanā aniccā saṅkhatā paṭiccasamuppannā khaya-dhammā vaya-dhammā virāga-dhammā nirodha-dhammā .*

pañña, and *pañña* is *sampajañña*, and *sampajañña* is a thorough understanding with critical, investigative, holistic, immediate, and multi-dimensional knowledge of how things really are, in the current context within the field of experience. They can also be defined in the reverse order: *sampajañña* is *pañña*, and *pañña* is *vipassanā*. This definition is tenable on the ground that all these terms are equivalent and mutually coextensive - all engage with their objects critically, investigatively, holistically and with thorough vision of what they are.

Etymologically, the term *sampajañña* has the prefix *sam*, meaning 'thoroughly' or 'fully' or 'totality', followed by *pa*, meaning 'correctly' and then *jañña*, 'knowing with wisdom' or 'thorough understanding' - hence, *sam + pa + jañña*, 'knowing correctly with wisdom', 'knowing in totality/fullness with a thorough understanding'. The etymological sense of the term *sampajañña* is confirmed through the definition of the word provided in the *Dhammasaṅgaṇī*:

What is *sampajañña*? That which is wisdom, understanding, analysis, depth analysis, truth-analysis, discernment, discrimination, differentiation, erudition, proficiency, skill, examination, consideration, close examination, breath, sagacity, guidance, insight, thorough understanding of impermanence, ... right view - this is called *sampajañña* (*Dhammasaṅgaṇī*, 1359; see *Vibhaṅga*, 360; and *Puggalapaññatti*, 80).¹

The same text, in brief, says 'insightful awareness itself is *sampajañña*' (*sampajaññaṃ ti pañña*). Glossing over the definition the *Dīgha Nikāya Tīkā* states: 'one who understands the totality clearly with wisdom from all angles, or one who knows distinctly, has *sampajañña*' (DNT 2.373).²

1. *Sampajāno ti tattha katamaṃ sampajaññaṃ? Yā paññā pajānanā vicayo pavicayo dhammavicayo sallalakkhaṇā upalakkhaṇā paccupalakkhaṇā paṇḍiccaṃ kosallaṃ nepuññaṃ vebhabyā cintā upaparikkhā bhūrī medhā pariṇāyikā vipassanā sampajaññaṃ... samamādiṭṭhi—idaṃ vuccati sampajañña.*

2. *Samantato pakārehi pakatṭhaṃ vā savisesaṃ jānāti ti sampajāno.*

Confirming the above characterisations of *sampajañña* and arguing that definition is intimately connected to the awareness of *vedanā*, in the *Samyutta Nikāya*, the Buddha explains *sampajañña* in the following terms:

And how, O monks, does a monk understand thoroughly (*sampajāno hoti*)? Here, monks, a monk knows sensations arising in him, knows their persisting, and knows their passing away; knows each initial application of the mind on an object arising in him, knows it persisting and knows its passing away; knows the perceptions in him, knows their persisting and knows their passing away. This, monks, is how a monk understands thoroughly. A monk should abide mindfully and composed. This is our instruction to you (SN 3.5.401).¹

The term *sampajañña* therefore comes to mean an experiential awareness of the impermanent, nonself, and empty nature of the *vedanā*. In the same vein, the commentaries such as the *Dhammsaṅgaṇī Atthkathā* explains: '*sampajañña* as wisdom which knows impermanence [*dukkha* and *anattā*] in a right way' (16).² In other words *sampajañña* is established mindfully engaging with the *vedanā*, for it is a thorough awareness of the evanescent nature of the *vedanā* on the experiential level. So, it is the wisdom of *sampajañña* that enables the *vipassanā* to become fully aware of the transient nature of *vedanā* at the level of experience. As the experiential awareness of the *sampajañña* progressively becomes piercing and penetrating, the subtlest underlying realities of *vedanā* and the contents of *vedanā* become thoroughly visible to its awareness, from many different angles. Consequently *sampajañña* eliminates the conditioned and addictive habit of *taṇhā*'s reaction against the bodily or mental experience with the fixation of either craving or aversion or indifference.

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1. *Kattañca bhikkhave, bhikkhu sampajāno hoti? Idha, bhikkhave, bhikkhuno viditā vedanā uppajjanti, viditā upaṭṭhahanti, viditā abbhataṃ gacchanti. Viditā vitakkā uppajjanti, viditā upaṭṭhahanti, viditā abbhataṃ gacchanti. Viditā sañña uppajjanti, viditā upaṭṭhahanti, viditā abbhataṃ gacchanti. Evaṃ kho, bhikkhave, bhikkhu, sampajāno hoti. Sato, bhikkhave, bhikkhu vihareyya sampajāno. Ayaṃ vo amhākaṃ anusāsani'ū*
 2. *Samnā pakārehi aniccādini jānāti ti sampajaññaṃ*

Four arguments verify the claim: first, that the penetrating vision of *samapajañña* deconstructs the entire personality structure into what is traditionally known as the 'five aggregates' (*pañcakkhandha*: the aggregate of form, of sensations, of volitional formations, of perceptions and of consciousnesses) within oneself. It therefore establishes the wisdom realising a composed and interdependent nature of what is 'I' and 'mine' which directly counteracts the *taṇhā*'s addictive fixation on a reified self, the assumption of the existence of a unified and autonomous self and the experience associated with it; second, that the penetrating vision of *samapajañña* establishes each of the five aggregates, hence, one's whole being or personality structure, as constituted merely by the combusting and the vibrating phenomenal processes (*sabbo loko pakampito*) governed by the law of *anicca* - the ever transient matrix of the physical and mental phenomena - thus directly combating the *taṇhā*'s addictive fixation onto a reified and erroneous notion of the temporally enduring personal self and the experiences associated with it; third, that the penetrating vision of *samapajañña* establishes one's whole being/existence as marked by *anattā* - 'not-I', 'not-me', 'not-mine', 'not-my self', 'not-self' - hence *suñña*, empty of any core-essence, empty of any substance, empty of any abiding spirit; thus directly combating the conditioned habit of *taṇhā* fixation onto an ontologically reified self as the core essence of person and the experience associated with such beliefs; and finally, that the penetrating vision of *sampajañña* combats the *taṇhā*'s conditioned habits of feeding into the pleasant, the unpleasant and neutral *vedanās* by reacting to them respectively with craving, aversion and indifference thereby multiplying the suffering. This follows on the ground that *sampajañña* dismantles the entire personality structure, of which *experience* forms a part and it is the experience upon which *taṇhā* is fixated; thus the penetrating vision of *sampajañña* directly eradicates craving, aversion and ignorance.

The implication of the arguments is this: Wisdom of *sampajañña* is the cognitive process which puts an end to *taṇhā* of addictive habit, of relishing and yearning for the pleasant experience, of disliking and being

repelled by the unpleasant experience, and of ignoring and being indifferent to the neutral experience. This process of deep psychological and emotional transformation however, it is argued, naturally occurs when the mind stops feeding on the addictive nature of *taṇhā* at the level of bodily sensation. And it is only through the holistic wisdom of *sampajañña*, that mind is actually set free from the addictive nature of *taṇhā*. It therefore makes logical sense to argue that without the cultivation of *sampajañña*, wisdom arisen from the insightful experiential level, an ultimate way out from the addictive fixation of *taṇhā* is simply not possible given that any addictive mental habit must ultimately be addressed at the level of *vedanā*. This must follow because the fermentation of the fixation of craving, aversion and ignorance occurs at the level of bodily/emotional/psychological experience.

But the question still remains. How does the *vīpassanā* methodologically or practically establish a *sampajañña*, while operating directly within the framework of one's *vedanā*, namely with the domain of one's direct experience, appropriating *vedanā* itself to awaken the full awareness of *sampajañña* in order to eradicate the conditioned reactive habit of *taṇhā*? The answer lies in understanding the methodological argument related to the *satipaṭṭhāna*s, the foundations of mindfulness.

7. The Methodological Argument of *Satipaṭṭhāna* (Foundations of Mindfulness)

The argument reads as follows: that the *satipaṭṭhāna* (foundation of mindfulness/awareness) methodologically establishes the practice of *vīpassanā* to operate entirely within the domain of one's direct experience since the *satipaṭṭhāna* practice appropriates *vedanā* - bodily and emotional/psychological experiences - to awakening the full awareness of *sampajañña* - wisdom which eradicates the conditioned reactive habit of *taṇhā*. This argument is supported by four premises. First, that the wisdom of *sampajañña* established through the mindfulness of one's body (*kāya-anupassanā-satipaṭṭhāna*) eradicates the *taṇhā*'s conditioned fixation on one's bodily activities on the ground that the awareness of the body is

established *within* the scope of bodily activities (such as awareness of the incoming or the outgoing breath). Second, that the wisdom of *sampajañña* established through the mindfulness of bodily *vedanā* (*vedanā-anupassanā-satipaṭṭhāna*) eliminates the *taṇhā*'s conditioned habit of reacting against the pleasant, the unpleasant and the neutral experiences arising on one's body on the ground that the awareness of *vedanā* of the bodily experience is established *within* the scope/framework of *bodily experience*. Third, that the wisdom of *sampajañña* established through the awareness of consciousness (*citta-anupassanā-satipaṭṭhāna*) eliminates the *taṇhā*'s conditioned habit of reacting against the wholesome/unwholesome/neutral states of consciousness on the ground that this awareness is established/founded *within* the framework of one's *consciousness*. And finally, that the wisdom of *sampajañña* established through the awareness of mental contents (*dharma-anupassanā-vipassanā*), namely, that which arises in the mental consciousness, eliminates the *taṇhā*'s conditioned habit of emotionally/psychologically reacting against the pleasant experience associated with the arising of the wholesome mental states (of love, goodwill, benevolence, generosity etc.), the unpleasant experience associated with the arising of the unwholesome mental states (of greed, hate, anger, jealousy, ill-will etc.) and the indifferent attitudes towards the arising of the neutral emotional and psychological states on the ground that this awareness is established/founded *within* the framework of *mental contents*.

These premises are drawn from the *Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna-sutta* (DN 22), the text used as the manual of *vipassanā* practice in the Theravādin traditions, in which the Buddha suggest the *catuḥ-satipaṭṭhānas* as the means to cultivating the *vipassanā*. Etymologically *sati* means 'mindfulness/awareness' *paṭṭhāna* means 'foundation/establish'. *Satipaṭṭhāna* is therefore defined either as 'the foundation/basis of mindfulness/awareness' or as 'firmly establishing the mindfulness/awareness'.¹ The argument which concerns the definitive ways in which the methodological aspect of the *vipassanā* works is however presented more concisely in the

1. *bhusaṃ tiṭṭhatīti paṭṭhānaṃ; sati eva paṭṭhānaṃ satipaṭṭhānaṃ.*

Mahāparinibbāna-sutta (DN 16). The *sutta* explicitly stresses the points that the practice of *vipassanā* constitutes the mindfully and ardently *observing body in the body, experience (sensation/feeling) in the experience (sensation/feeling), mind/consciousness in the mind/consciousness and mental objects in the mental objects* (DN 16).

Let us briefly explore the implications of each of the clauses used in the *Mahāparinibbāna-sutta*. First, to argue that mindfulness of the body requires establishing the awareness of *body within the body* is to claim that the body in question, the object of awareness, is not another's person body, rather it is the body of the individual practitioner of the *vipassanā*. This follows on the ground that while it is possible to establish the awareness of one's own body *within* the framework of one's own body based on a direct experience of the body at the level of *vedanā*, this is however not the case with the body of someone else. Another person's body, since awareness is always mediated by language and thought, can only be apprehended through conceptual means, and therefore cannot be based on direct awareness. Hence someone else's body cannot be another person's object for cultivating the mindfulness of the body. Second, to argue that mindfulness of experience (sensation/feeling) requires establishing the awareness of experience *within* the experience is to argue that the awareness of the arising and the passing away of the bodily experience and of mental feeling should be established within one's own bodily and mental experience. This follows on the ground that the experience belonging to person x cannot be the object of a direct awareness of the experience of a person y. While the establishment of a direct awareness of the experience *within* the experience entails directly experiencing the flow of bodily and mental experience, such direct experience would not be possible in the case of another person's experience. Therefore the experience in question must not be an experience belonging to someone else. Similar is the case with the third and the fourth foundations of mindfulness. The *mind* in question in the case of the mindfulness of the mind is also restricted to the mindfulness of the practitioner's own mind as it requires the establishment of the awareness of

the mind within the framework of the mind by way of directly experiencing it. Finally the *mental object* in question in the case of mindfulness of mental objects is also restricted to one's own mental states as mindfulness of mental objects requires the establishment of awareness within the mental objects by way of directly experiencing them. And it is hard to conceive if such a direct awareness is possible with respect to another person's contents of thoughts, for it would always be meditated by language and concepts.

There is another argument we need to consider regarding why *vipassanā* should be practised through the medium of the four foundations of mindfulness in the way it is suggested in the *Mahāsatipatthāna-sutta* (DN 22) and the *Mahāparinibbāna-sutta* (DN 16). *Vipassanā*, by its very definition, is to see things as they truly are, and it is to be found through the direct awareness of the nature of things as they really are, in contrast to imagining/visualising or conceptually reifying the objects. The *Rohitassa Sutta* of the *Aṅguttara Nikāya* (AN 4.45) brings home the rationale behind the principle of observing the truths *within* one's own psychophysical aggregates starkly, as they really are. 'Just within this fathom-long body, with its perception and intellect, I declare that there is the world, the origination of the world, the cessation of the world, and the path of practice leading to the cessation of the world' (AN 4.45). The 'world' to which the Buddha is referring in the *sutta* is none other than the five psychophysical aggregates, the basis of our direct experience, and the role of *vipassanā* is to develop and harness the *paññā*, insightful awareness of one's own aggregates through the four foundations of mindfulness. The *sutta* clarifies the argument of why the practice of *vipassanā* strictly operates within the confines of one's own five psychophysical aggregates, and why the four foundations of mindfulness operate within the *vedanā*, personal experiential domain. Since the five psychophysical aggregates are the only viable basis for developing a direct insightful awareness of the *vipassanā*, and since a firmly established mindfulness is the key to gain the mastery and control over one's own ever flippanant nature of the six *viññāṇas*, 'consciousnesses' which are always drifting tempestuously, and without this mastery, it is not

possible to develop a firmly established mindfulness. It follows therefore that without the direct awareness of the five aggregates, as the *sutta* points out, there is simply no *vipassanā*. The *sutta* supports this position on four counts stating the fact that there is no *vipassanā* if there is no direct insightful awareness of the four truths. If the latter is absent then the truth of suffering is not realised, the truth of origin of suffering is not eradicated, the truth of cessation of suffering is not attained and the truth of path leading to cessation of suffering is not undertaken. This follows on the ground that the realisation of each of the four noble truths are dependent on the insightful awareness of the *vipassanā*, and the cultivation of the insightful awareness of the *vipassanā* is dependent on directly experiencing the truths pertaining to the five aggregates. The latter is dependent on the direct awareness of one's own (as opposed to another person's) five psychophysical aggregates, and this in turn is dependent on experiencing the *vedanā*, either physically, emotionally or psychologically.

So whether it is mindfulness of the body, or mindfulness of the experience (sensations/feelings), or mindfulness of the minds/consciousnesses, or mindfulness of the mental contents, it is abundantly clear from the arguments presented above, *vedanā* plays central roles in the cultivation of the insightful awareness of *paññā* through the practice of *vipassanā*, and therefore that the awareness of *vedanā* must not be ignored at any stage. Both in its principles and in practice, it consistently reflects that *vipassanā* works strictly within the realm of experience, and that the practice would not constitute the practice of *vipassanā* if it does not operate within the confines of the experiential domain. Thus the presence of the insightful awareness of the *vedanā* is critical in every aspect of the practice of *vipassanā*, from the beginning till the end.

Having discussed the theoretical framework of *vipassanā*, what remains is this question, when does one implement the theory of *vipassanā* into practice? Observing the *vedanā*, (bodily sensations, mental and emotional feelings) within the framework of one's body and mind, is not an easy task, given the extrovert nature of the mind. Suffice it to say however

that the mind, being too imaginative, speculative and reactive, restless and agitated, is mostly unaware of things as they really are. Habitually seeking satisfaction or gratification of some kind from one stream of thought to another, from one set of ideas to another, from one memory to another, the mind constantly moves from the past to the future, back and forth, to and fro. The problem however is, as Krishnamurti points out, 'the real is near, you do not have to seek it; and man who seeks truth will never find it. Truth is in what *is*—and that is the beauty of it' (1954: 24). So the implementation of the theory of *vipassanā* into practice requires the mind to live here and now in the eternal present—it needs to stop seeking in the past or the future. In the *Therānāma Sutta* the Buddha delivers this insightful instruction: 'Do not pursue the past. Do not lost yourself in the future. The past no longer is. The future has not yet come. Looking deeply at life as it is in the very here and now, the practitioner dwells in stability and peace' (SN 21:20). Being in the present is, as Thich Nhat Hanh reminds us 'the only moment we can touch life' (1988:40). Often-cited, the Buddha's instruction to the elderly Mālun̄kyaputta also resonates the stress on the mindfulness of the present: 'Mālun̄kyaputta, regarding things seen, heard, sensed, and cognised by you: in the seen there will be merely the seen; in the heard there will be merely the heard; in the sensed there will be merely the sensed; in the cognised there will be merely the cognised' (SN 35:95). According to the Buddha, to enjoy the life is to take care of the present and live it fully, both physically and mentally. By taking care of the present, both the future and the past are taken care of. The future becomes the present, the present becomes the past. Fully living the present is itself living the past and the future meaningfully. Free from the woes and agonies of the past and the fears and anxieties of the future, the life lived in the present is safe and secure, calm and quiet, and thus a happy and meaningful life.

Conclusion

Having considered the arguments advanced outlining the theoretical principles of *vipassanā* meditation, we are now in a much better position to draw some conclusions. First, from the etymological and epistemological

arguments of *paññā* ('insightful awareness') what is demonstrated is the identity of *vipassanā* 'insightful awareness' and the *bhāvanā-mayā paññā* 'lived awareness' as both centre on the awareness of the truth as it is. The phenomenological argument of *vedanā* 'experience', reveals an undeniable interconnection between the direct insightful awareness of *vipassanā*, on the one hand, and *vedanā*, on the other. This is on the ground that the former is only feasible through the medium of the latter, since it is not possible to cultivate a direct insightful awareness without the experience of *vedanā*, bodily/mentally/emotionally, as a vehicle. The crucial corroboration for the argument comes from the Buddha's famous injunction addressing a mutual inter-relationship between the *rūpa* 'matter' and the *nāma* 'mind' where the sensation/feeling is understood as the locus and the instrument through which the direct insightful awareness of the *vipassanā* is said to emerge. While *vedanā* provides the basis for the arising of an insightful awareness, as the latter depends on the direct awareness of the former, what can be concluded is, *vedanā* is not in itself constitutive of insight or wisdom on the ground that mere experience does not imply an insightful awareness, therefore, it does entail the wisdom of *vipassanā*. The psychological argument of '*taṇhā* 'craving' ' reinforces the thesis that the experience of *vedanā* is not only a basis for the arising of insightful awareness, it equally provides a basis for the arising of *avijjā* 'ignorance', 'confusion' - the very antithesis of awareness, consequently the basis for the arising of *taṇhā*'s psychological and emotional fixation through craving, aversion, and indifference - since these are the causal conditions for the arising of suffering, the same *vedanā* is therefore a basis for the arising of the chain of suffering and stress. Another important implication of this argument is as follows: while the other systems maintain the sensory objects as the basis for the arising of craving, the *vipassanā*-tradition sees the experience of *vedanā* arising as a result of the contact of the senses with their respective objects as the basis for the arising of craving. While the other systems maintain the renunciation of the attachment to the sensory objects as a pathway to the freedom from the fixation of *taṇhā*, and therefore from the

suffering, *vipassanā* tradition, on the other hand, argues that it is the renunciation of the attachment to *vedanā* of the physical sensation or emotional feelings as a pathway to the freedom from the fixation of *taṇhā*, and therefore from the suffering since the latter is conditioned by the former. From this argument what follows is that the addictiveness or fixation of *taṇhā* is at the root of human problems on the ground that *taṇhā*'s addictiveness of craving, aversion and indifference is deeply seeded in the experience of *vedanā*. Therefore, it follows, the root of human suffering cannot be addressed fully without eliminating the addictive nature of *taṇhā* at the level of *vedanā*, experience.

But how does *vipassanā* address this problem? It is argued that the answer to this question lies in the understanding of the inner workings of the insightful awareness of the *vipassanā* meditation. To be more precise, one has to understand the way in which *vipassanā* shakes off the craving for the pleasant, aversion for the unpleasant, and indifference for the neutral bodily/mental/emotional experiences. The next three inter related arguments explain the ways in which the insightful awareness of *vipassanā* dissolves the addictiveness of *taṇhā* at the experiential level on the ground that the entire process of freedom from the conditioning of *taṇhā* hinges on the awareness of the *vedanā*, bodily/mental/emotional sensations or feelings.

The soteriological argument of *vedanā* and *taṇhā* has shown three pathways in which *vipassanā* eradicates the conditionings, fixations and addictiveness of *taṇhā* by employing the *vedanā*, sensation/feeling as an instrumental device. It has shown the following: first, the unpleasant experience is employed as a means to eradicate the addictiveness of aversion towards the unpleasant sensation/feelings; second, the pleasant experience is employed as a means to eradicate the addictiveness of craving and clinging towards the pleasant experience, and finally, the neutral experience is employed as a vehicle to eradicate the addictiveness of ignorance and indifference towards the neutral experience. So this argument is adduced by three premises corresponding to three approaches based on employing the *vedanā* as pathways to eradicating *taṇhā* in the *vipassanā* practice such that

these three pathways corresponds to three addictive expressions of *taṇhā* - craving, aversion and ignorance.

The epistemological argument based on the role of *sampajaññā* has shown further the significance of the experience of *vedanā*. It does this in two ways: first it has shown that *vedanā* is that which enables the *sampajaññā* to realise the experience of sensation/feeling (be it pleasant, unpleasant or neutral) as an inherently transient, evanescent, empty and coreless process. Second, it has shown, that through the cultivation of *sampajaññā*, realising the nature of experience, that dispels the continued operation of *taṇhā*'s addictive nature of relishing, yearning, reaching-out for the pleasant experience, *taṇhā*'s addictive nature of disliking, hating, repelling the unpleasant experience, and *taṇhā*'s addictive nature of ignoring the neutral experience. Therefore, it follows, the freedom from the addictive fixation of *taṇhā*, the key to unlocking the door to the ultimate release, is again, based on the direct insightful awareness of the experience of *vedanā*.

The methodological argument based on the 'application of the foundation of mindfulness' (*catuḥsatipaṭṭhāna*) addressed the practical concerns of grounding the *vipassanā* deeper within the experiential domain by way of advancing the four arguments, each formulated corresponding to the role of each of the 'four foundations of mindfulness'. The argument on the 'mindfulness of body' (*kāya-anupassanā-satipaṭṭhāna*) has shown that it needs to be cultivated within the framework of the body itself based on a direct awareness of the bodily activities. The argument on the 'mindfulness of sensation' (*vedanā-anupassanā-satipaṭṭhāna*) has shown that it has to be cultivated within the limits of the bodily experiences, based on the direct awareness of the realities pertaining to the bodily sensations themselves. So too, the argument of the 'mindfulness of mind' (*citta-anupassanā-satipaṭṭhāna*) has shown that it has to be cultivated within the mind itself, based on the direct awareness of the realities pertaining to the mind. Similarly, the argument of the 'mindfulness of mental contents' (*dhamma-anupassanā-vipassanā*) has shown that it has to be cultivated within the mental contents, based on the direct awareness of the realities pertaining to

the contents of mind such as thoughts or emotions. In all four foundations of mindfulness, the awareness must be firmly established either within the body, or experience or consciousness or contents of thoughts. This goes to show that in all four methods of cultivating the mindfulness of *vipassanā*, the application and the experience of *vedanā* is equally vital. Without the experience of either the bodily *vedanā* or the mental/emotional *vedanā*, as indicated earlier, it is not possible to anchor the direct insightful awareness on the phenomenological facts of the body, the experience, the mind and the mental contents.

So what is shown through these seven arguments is this: *vipassanā* meditation is not what most of us think it is. It is not an escapist route, for it is not a psychological or cognitive withdrawal from the reality of life. Nor is it a mystical practice, for nothing mystical is present in its principles and practice to justify the mysticism so-called. If *vipassanā* is anything at all, it is a sustained awareness that anchors one's mental life firmly in the grip of the truths of the present moment within oneself while fully and actively participating in the world, both physically and mentally. That is the only *vipassanā* way.

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